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Sixty-ninth year

Provisional

7140th meeting
Tuesday, 18 March 2014, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Ms. Lucas	(Luxembourg)
Members:	Argentina	Mrs. Perceval
	Australia	Mr. Quinlan
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Errázuriz
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Araud
	Jordan	Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein
	Lithuania	Mrs. Kazragienė
	Nigeria	Mr. Laro
	Republic of Korea	Mr. Oh Joon
	Russian Federation	Mr. Pankin
	Rwanda	Mr. Manzi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Mrs. DiCarlo

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Feltman.

Mr. Feltman: We meet today against the backdrop of last week's dangerous escalation in Gaza and Israel that concluded with a fragile calm. That latest upsurge serves to underscore the fact that the status quo is not sustainable.

Eight months since the resumption of talks between Israelis and Palestinians, United States-led efforts to present a basis for continued negotiations are ongoing. We are yet again approaching some decisive timelines. Leaders on both sides are confronted with difficult decisions. Public support for peace among Israelis and among Palestinians — Palestinians both in the West Bank and in Gaza — will be tested.

The international community's commitment to engage in those efforts on the basis of existing principles has remained steadfast. On 3 and 17 March, the United States President met individually with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas in Washington, D.C.; Secretary Kerry met with President Abbas in that city on 16 March and with the King of Jordan in the first week of March. In late February and earlier this month, Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Cameron made visits to Israel and Palestine and impressed upon their interlocutors the importance of progress on the peace track. Meeting in Cairo on 9 March, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the League of Arab States reinforced their position that all final status issues be addressed in line with principles outlined in the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Quartet envoys also continued their internal consultations and met separately with the parties.

We have stressed before the importance of tangible steps to improve socioeconomic conditions on the ground, which must go hand in hand with and reinforce the political process. The urgent need for progress in that regard was acknowledged at a conference in Prague on 8 to 9 March. Jointly organized by the Quartet representative and the United States Secretary of State, the conference brought together approximately 100 international business people, Palestinian Authority officials and key figures in the Palestinian private sector. Early estimates suggest that economic activity weakened in 2013 in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The International Monetary Fund projects only a 2.5 per cent increase in real gross domestic product in 2014, well below the growth needed to absorb new job seekers. Unemployment reached 23.4 per cent last year — the highest level since 2010. In February, the Palestinian Cabinet approved a $4.2 billion budget for 2014, reflecting a 9 per cent increase from 2013. The 2014 budget presents a current deficit of $1.3 billion and development financing needs of $333 million.

Worrying trends continued in the West Bank. Israeli security forces carried out 292 search-and-arrest operations. Three Palestinians were shot dead by Israeli forces: a Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine activist killed on 27 February in Birzeit, near Ramallah; a civilian Jordanian citizen killed at the Allenby crossing to Jordan on 10 March; and a Palestinian civilian killed that same day near the illegal settlement outpost of Givat Assaf near Ramallah. Subsequent to Prime Minister Netanyahu's expression of regret to King Abdullah of Jordan last week, Israeli President Shimon Peres offered his deepest condolences and regret to Jordan on behalf of Israel over last week's shooting at the Allenby crossing. We continue to urge investigations into all such incidents and note that agreement has been reached to establish a joint Israeli-Jordanian investigation into the Allenby Bridge shooting.

A total of 325 Palestinians were arrested, including an alleged Izz el-Deen al-Qassam Brigades leader in Hebron on 4 March, and 128 Palestinians were injured. An Israeli soldier was also injured. Clashes also continued in and around refugee camps, in particular in Al-Jalazun camp near Ramallah, and during demonstrations against the barrier.

In five instances, Palestinian security forces defused unexploded ordnance in different parts of the West Bank between 3 and 6 March. On 5 March, they

reportedly took into custody and handed over to Israeli security forces an Israeli settler detained by Palestinian farmers while uprooting olive trees near Nablus.

Settler attacks resulted in eight Palestinians injured, including two children. On 2 March, a settler vehicle reportedly fatally struck a 66-year-old Palestinian near Ramallah. Settler attacks also resulted in damage to Palestinian property. Approximately 390 trees and saplings were reportedly vandalized, including about 180 olive trees uprooted near Qalqiliya on 2 March. On 26 February, Palestinian stone- and Molotov-cocktail-throwing attacks resulted in injuries to three settlers near Nablus and material damage to vehicles, including to the vehicle of an Israeli Knesset member near Nablus on 9 March.

The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics stated on 3 March that construction in the settlements more than doubled in 2013 as compared to 2012. We are also concerned about any movement towards approval of settlement projects in East Jerusalem. Continued settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law and an obstacle to peace.

Demolitions continued on a smaller scale as compared to the previous reporting period. Eight structures, including five residences, were demolished in East Jerusalem, displacing 23 people, including 12 children. We are concerned that, in late February, the Israeli authorities issued stop-work orders against 18 residential and livelihood-related structures in the Bedouin community of Jabal Al-Baba, which was funded by international donors to support the vulnerable community. Over 85 per cent of the residents in that area are refugees. We reiterate the importance of Palestinian access to a fair planning and zoning system.

Tensions continued to increase with respect to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif. A debate on whether to extend Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif on 25 February in the Israeli Knesset plenary, which concluded without action, was followed by clashes on the ground and by strong Palestinian and Jordanian opposition. We call on all parties to show the utmost restraint regarding the holy compound. Provocative acts from any quarter must cease, and the sanctity of holy sites of all faiths must be fully respected. The Secretary-General underscores that incitement, whatever its source, poisons the atmosphere for peace. He calls upon Israeli and Palestinian leaders to exercise their responsibilities in halting incitement.

We remain concerned about the health of eight Palestinian prisoners on ongoing hunger strike protesting their administrative detention, five of whom are currently in Israeli hospitals. Administrative detainees should be either charged or released. We have also seen reports that additional Palestinian prisoners and detainees, who had previously announced the start of a hunger strike to begin today, have called off that strike.

Turning to Gaza, the underpinnings of the ceasefire understanding continued to be undermined. As mentioned earlier, a dangerous escalation of violence took place between 11 and 13 March. More than 70 rockets and 5 mortar shells were indiscriminately fired towards Israel, the majority of which were claimed by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Over 50 landed in Israel, fortunately without resulting in injuries. Israel conducted 15 airstrikes on Gaza in March, resulting in the death of 5 militants reportedly affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and injuries to 5 Palestinian civilians. A 57-year-old Palestinian woman was shot dead by Israeli forces on 28 February during a protest in the vicinity of the border fence, and another two Palestinian civilians were injured in similar circumstances. The Secretary-General strongly condemned the firing of multiple rockets into Israel and called on all actors to exercise maximum restraint. He also deplores the loss of civilian life under any circumstances.

On 5 March, Israeli naval forces intercepted a ship in the Red Sea allegedly transporting arms from Iran to the Gaza Strip. The cargo reportedly included 40 M-302 rockets with a range of up to 160 kilometres and 181 mortar shells and approximately 400,000 7.62-calibre rounds. We condemn all illegal weapons smuggling and call for the full implementation of resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). If the allegations of arms shipments from Iran are true, that also appears to be a violation of resolution 1747 (2007).

At the same time, the economic and humanitarian situation continued to worsen in the context of a tightened access regime and violence, both severely affecting the lives of the population in Gaza. Compounding an already dire electricity situation, the near shutdown of Gaza's only power plant was averted by another last-minute Qatari contribution of $32 million to procure industrial fuel for the plant. The Qatari contribution is expected to enable the Gaza power plant to continue generating some 55 megawatts daily for an additional 3 months. The current situation highlights the need

to advance a sustainable structural solution to Gaza's energy problems.

Gaza's unemployment rate is 38.5 per cent. Extremely limited movement in and out of Gaza from the Erez and Rafah crossings continues to afflict the civilian population, including patients awaiting medical treatment. Recurrent drug and medical equipment shortages are affecting the Gaza medical system, further increasing the number of patients seeking referral outside for medical conditions that could have been treated inside Gaza, were supplies available. Approximately $250,000 per month would be required to cover the cost of those critical medical supplies. The United Nations is seeking donors' assistance to establish an emergency medical safety net while urging the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza to develop a structural solution to the problem.

Meanwhile, work on previously commenced United Nations projects has not resumed as originally agreed to with the Israeli authorities, and about 15 projects, worth $14 million, remain stalled. Another 42 projects, valued at around $96 million, are still awaiting Israeli approval.

We fully recognize the complex security dimension of the situation in Gaza. However, the price should not be paid by the people of Gaza. In the context of deteriorating humanitarian and development conditions, the United Nations finds it increasingly difficult to provide assistance to the population of Gaza while restrictions on access, including for United Nations operations, persist and have even increased. We would like to call the attention of the Council to that unsustainable situation in the Gaza Strip and appeal to all parties concerned to contribute to alleviating the deteriorating conditions of the civilian population.

The Council was extensively briefed on Syria last week by Joint Special Representative Brahimi. The Secretary-General and Mr. Brahimi also briefed the General Assembly, so I will not repeat their clear messages. The situation on the Golan remains volatile, with heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and members of the armed opposition. Shelling continued primarily in the southern part of the area of separation and in the area of limitation adjacent to it. In a recent development, on 5 March, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) fired 17 tank rounds towards the village of New Hamadiyah in the northern part of the area of separation. The IDF informed the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force that it had taken the action in response to persons placing an unknown object at the technical fence, west of the ceasefire line. I also note that there are news reports reaching the Council of additional clashes that reportedly injured three Israeli soldiers near Majdal Shams. The upcoming report of the Secretary-General and subsequent briefing to the Council by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations will provide details of the situation on the Golan.

In Lebanon, the Government formed on 15 February submitted its ministerial policy statement to Parliament and is awaiting a vote of confidence, due on 20 March. I am encouraged by the Government's focus on matters such as respect for United Nations resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006); follow-up on the work of the International Support Group for Lebanon; support for decisions taken under Lebanon's national dialogue; and recognition of the importance of securing Lebanon's borders, improving security and preparing for the presidential election process, which is due to start on 25 March and to take place by 25 May. It remains important that all parties in Lebanon continue to work together in the same spirit in which the new Government was formed in order to tackle the very significant security and humanitarian challenges that the country faces.

On 22 February, a Jabhat A+l-Nusra suicide bomber detonated a car bomb at a Lebanese Armed Forces checkpoint in the Bekaa town of Hermel, killing three people, including two soldiers. On 16 March, another suicide bomber detonated a car bomb in the town of Nabi Othman, in the eastern area of Baalbek, killing 4 and injuring at least 10. Clashes in Tripoli between the predominantly Alawite area of Jabel Mohsen and the Sunni neighbourhood of Bab Al-Tabbaneh broke out once again on 13 March, leading to 12 deaths and tens of injuries. Rocket fire into the Bekaa region and Syrian airforce strikes have continued, causing a number of deaths, injuries and material damage in Lebanese towns and villages, including Arsal, Labwe and Brittal. We are very concerned about the impact on Lebanon of the fighting on the Syrian side of the border and remind the Syrian authorities of the need for full respect of Lebanon's sovereignty.

In a letter dated 27 February (S/2014/134), the Lebanese authorities said that on 24 February, an Israeli military aircraft had violated Lebanese airspace, raiding the outskirts of Janta town and firing several missiles within Lebanese territory, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). On 14 March, there were reports

of a roadside bomb ambush against Israeli soldiers in the Shaba'a farms area. The Israel Defense Forces reportedly fired a number of artillery rounds across the Blue Line in retaliation for the attack. An investigation by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is under way. We urge all parties to fully respect the Blue Line and to refrain from any action that would constitute a violation of the relevant resolutions.

On 5 March, the Government of France hosted a ministerial meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon in Paris, which was attended by President Sleiman and President Hollande. The meeting reaffirmed the international community's commitment to Lebanon's stability and security, including support for its State institutions and policy of disassociation. It also reviewed the progress made on the Group's support agenda for refugees, the Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces and called for greater international assistance going forward. Additional contributions were made to the joint United Nations-World Bank multi-donor trust fund for Lebanon. The Government of Italy announced its intention to host a senior officials' meeting in Rome on 10 April in preparation for a higher level conference in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The recent escalation in security incidents along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria is affecting humanitarian access. As the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, Lebanon struggles with the impact, including the presence of a refugee population from Syria of nearly 1 million people, who are in need of protection and assistance. The United Nations is engaging with the newly formed Government to help coordinate the urgent humanitarian needs of refugees and to consolidate support for the Government's national response through its road map for stabilization.

In conclusion, last week, with the situation in Gaza, we came very close to the brink of another crisis in an already volatile region. We should take that as yet another reminder of the need to work together to restore prospects for a durable regional peace. The Middle East still faces an unpredictable future with multiple sources of uncertainty. What is certain, however, is that the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be ignored in shaping the future constructively. The Secretary-General remains convinced that a solution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, in the form of a negotiated two-State solution, is the best contribution to regional stability that we can make at this time.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Feltman for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.